

# The February 2026 SPIRE

The Newsletter of the  
Episcopal Church of the Ascension,  
Sierra Madre, California



## Upcoming Events

\*Please see the calendar on page 8 for an updated list of events.\*



**February 18th**

Noon  
&  
6pm

**Mass & Imposition of Ashes**

## From the Rector

I am incredibly grateful for the weeks ahead.

I go to North Carolina a week from now to join with colleagues from around the national church to work at certifying the proficiency of those seeking to be ordained this year. Since there is a huge variety of ways that people are arriving at a theological education, the standards of expectation are very much in flux. In addition, the cost of offering a national examination is a factor for the whole Episcopal Church. Many dioceses have opted out of using the General Ordination Examination and are using locally created substitutes. Because priests are ordained for the whole Church and not simply for a particular congregation or diocese and because the teaching ministry of priesthood is so intrinsic to it, I believe there should be a "gold standard" to determine proficiency. There are big questions looming about this process, and I am proud to serve on the national General Board of Examining Chaplains. The bonus for me is the opportunity to see my grandkids in South Carolina as the bookends of my trip to the East coast.

On Shrove Tuesday, I will get the privilege of flipping pancakes, and burning palms. (This year, I will share the flipping duty with Father Bob, Mother Robin, and Deacon Ed.) And on Ash Wednesday, I will impose ashes in what is one of the most solemn moments of our life together. Lent, while penitential, is a deeper season for all of us. I find a different kind of joy in this season of self-reflection and restraint.

None of this would be possible without the community that is our parish family - the Church of the Ascension. For all that I am blessed with, I give thanks to God.

Father Michael+

## PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 22nd

10:30am

Hawks Hall

- ◇ Only (1) Mass on Sunday, February 22nd, at 9:30am.
- ◇ A light breakfast will follow the meeting.

Go to page 2 for more information about the Annual Meeting.

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
Tuesday, February 17th

## Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

Come have your fair share of Pancakes for Supper!

**Time:** 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

**Where:** Hawks Hall

**Cost:**

**\$6.00 Adults**

**\$4.00 Children twelve and under or \$20 for a family of four or more!**



**Please RSVP so we know how much food to prepare!**

**All proceeds will be donated to Friends in Deed.**

## JANUARY 2026

Pledge Payment Snapshot



**2026 Budget \$165,000**

YTD Budget: \$13,750

YTD Actual: \$27,345

Difference: \$+13,595

## Everything you always wanted to know about *The Annual Meeting (but ....)*



**Why do we have an Annual Meeting?** Our parish for legal purposes is a corporation. We have Parish Bylaws

which correspond to the Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Los Angeles. These state that our parish as well as every parish must have an Annual Meeting to elect “directors” which form the Vestry. The Vestry has responsibility for the “temporalities” of the parish. As in other congregations, it is the custom at Ascension that reports for the previous year are received, the budget for the next year, which the Vestry has already passed, is presented, and other business may be conducted. Occasionally, the Bylaws may be amended. Our Parish Bylaws state that the Rector presides, or in the absence of the Rector, the Senior Warden presides. At the Annual Meeting, we follow standard parliamentary procedure.

**Who can attend?** Everyone interested in our parish can attend the Annual Meeting. It is required that the time and place be announced beforehand. Our Parish Bylaws require us to have present twenty members who can vote to have a quorum.

**Who can vote?** The Diocesan Canons were changed a few years ago to include persons sixteen years and older as adult communicants in good standing. The canons were amended this year to essentially specify that in order to be an elector they must be:

- ⇒ An adult member of this parish who has received Holy Communion in this parish at least three times during the preceding year.
- ⇒ An adult communicant of this parish who for the previous year has been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and has been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, in order to be considered a communicant in good standing.

A list of our qualified electors has been published by the Vestry, and *will be* posted on the bulletin board in Hawks Hall. Our Parish Bylaws and the canons do not permit either proxies or absentee ballots.

**Who can be elected to the Vestry?** Our Parish Bylaws and the Canons state that anyone qualified to vote at the Annual Meeting can be elected to the Vestry. Our Parish Bylaws also state that a member of our Vestry must be a confirmed communicant and cannot be a member of another church. **It is expected (but not required) that anyone serving on the Vestry must be willing to commit the time necessary to serve, be regular in their attendance, be an example of good stewardship, and have a passion for the work of Christ in this parish.** Some folks have already been nominated either by the nominating committee or by indicating their desire to run, and there will be time during the meeting for nominations from the floor as well.

**Serving on the Vestry...** Each year at our Annual Meeting, the parish elects a new class of vestry members – this year we will be electing three persons for regular three year terms. The “job description” includes being a committed member of the parish who is regular in attendance and giving and who is willing to offer his or her gifts for the leadership of this parish. Vestry members may have particular responsibilities or portfolios and will be serving on such sub-committees as Finance, Insurance, and Operations & Property. Meetings are held monthly, and attendance at the annual workday/retreat is critical.

## Altar Flowers and Sanctuary Candles

The 2026 sign-up sheets for altar flowers and altar candles are now available on the bulletin board in Hawks Hall. **\*\*Payment should be made by CHECK (\$50.00 for flowers and \$15.00 for a candle) payable to Church of the Ascension.\*\*** Please include a note giving the date that you signed up for and any dedication.



## Invitation to a Holy Lent

Although it seems that we have just finished celebrating the Twelve Days of Christmas and Epiphany, the season of Lent is nearly upon us!

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and is set by counting back 46 days from Easter. Each year the date of Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. Counting back the 46 days from Easter, this year Ash Wednesday falls on February 18th.

As a reminder, and for those of you who may be new to the Episcopal Church, Lent is the 40 day (+ 6 Sundays) season of preparation leading up to the Great Feast of Easter. Lent is observed by many faithful Christians around the world as a time to focus on their spiritual lives and deepen their relationship with God through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

The observance of Lent was established in 325 CE at the Council of Nicea, although we know that its practices go back at least to the 3rd Century, and was often associated with the baptism of Christian converts at Easter. The 40 day period of Lent was likely modeled after Jesus' 40 day fast in the desert after his baptism and before the beginning of his public ministry and echoes the 40 day fasts of Moses and Elijah. The English word "Lent" is a shortened form of the Old English word *lencten*, meaning "spring season." Throughout the Lenten season, its solemnity is reflected in worship by the omission of the Gloria and Alleluias and with the inclusion of the Litany of Penance. Some congregations omit music altogether during Lent. Customarily there are no flowers at the altar and often the religious images in the sanctuary are veiled as well.

As Anglicans, we are called "to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word." (Ash Wednesday, BCP 265)

Now, of course, there are many ways we can personally attend to this call to a Holy Lent.

There are things we can GIVE UP such as sweets, caffeine, alcohol, and social media. Many people abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent and fast (consuming only one vegetarian meal) on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We can also give up bad habits like gossiping, complaining, and swearing during Lent.

Some folks prefer to ADD a spiritual discipline or practice during Lent. Some things to consider include attending weekday prayer services or Holy Eucharist. Church of the Ascension has a Holy Eucharist at 8:15 am each Thursday you might consider attending. Some people pray the Stations of the Cross, especially on Fridays during Lent. People also often turn to daily readings of scripture or practicing *lectio divina*, which is the prayerful method of slowly and repeatedly reading a short passage from the scriptures or other holy writings allowing the words to speak to the heart through reading and reflecting on the meaning of scripture. Another idea is to make a retreat, either away or at home to a place where you can have a time of quiet contemplation to journal, pray, and listen for the small quiet voice of God. There are also many online resources for Lenten devotions. Two that I recommend are from the Episcopal Church <https://forwardmovement.org/> and from the Center for Action and Contemplation <https://cac.org/>.

Or maybe you would prefer a more active Lenten discipline like beginning a new exercise routine to better care for your body, which is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. Or volunteer at a local food bank or other charity. This year the parish will be raising funds to buy new Easy-Ups for Friends in Deed during Lent. You can bring your donation to church on Sunday and place it in the offering plate or you can mail it to the church office.

Another way to give back is to write a letter each day to a friend or family member expressing your gratitude for their presence in your life. Or maybe you'd like to support our service personnel in the armed forces? You can check out <https://amillionthanks.org/>, <https://soldiersangels.org/> or <https://www.operationgratitude.com/>.

There are so many ways we can live into our call to observe a Holy Lent. If there are any you would like to share, please let me know!

Blessing,  
**Mother Robin**

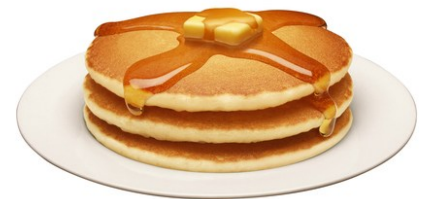
## IT'S TRADITION! SHROVE TUESDAY

Most of us know that Shrove Tuesday occurs the first Tuesday before [Ash Wednesday](#), and some of us know that it officially ends the season of [Epiphany](#). But did you know it began as a vigil for the starting of Lent?

The word *shrove* is the past participle of the English verb *to shrive*, which means to confess and receive [absolution](#) for one's [sins](#) by way of [confession](#) and doing [penance](#). During the week before Lent, sometimes called [Shrovetide](#) in English, Christians were expected to go to confession in preparation for the [penitential](#) season of turning to God.

Shrove Tuesday as we have come to know it originated during the Middle Ages. Food items like meats, fats, eggs, milk, and fish were regarded as restricted during Lent. To keep such food from being wasted, many families would have big feasts on Shrove Tuesday in order to consume those items that would inevitably become spoiled during the next forty days. The English tradition of eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday came about as a way to use as much milk, fats, and eggs as possible before Ash Wednesday began.

So now that you know the history, plan on joining us [February 17](#) for Ascension's own interpretation of this old Anglican custom. It's Tradition!



## What is Ash Wednesday and where did it originate?

The first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday comes the day after Shrove Tuesday. Traditionally a day of repentance, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent.

At Ash Wednesday Masses and services, ashes are imposed on the foreheads of the faithful. The priest or minister marks the forehead of each participant with black ashes in the shape of a cross. Traditionally, the ashes come from the burning of the previous year's palms. At Ascension, parishioners bring the palms they have saved from last year to the church the week before Ash Wednesday. These are burned and used to create the ashes which Father Michael imposes on us. When applying the ashes, the priest says, "Remember, O man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return" to remind us of our mortality. After the service, a worshipper traditionally retains the cross until it wears off.

Lent has been observed as a preparation for Easter since the fifth century. In the medieval period, Ash Wednesday was the required annual day of penitential confession occurring after fasting and the remittance of the tithe.

Ashes were used in ancient times to express mourning. Dusting oneself with ashes was the penitent's way of expressing sorrow for sins and faults. Following that tradition, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer designates Ash Wednesday as a day of fasting.

Lent lasts 40 days not counting Sundays because by our tradition every Sunday is a little Easter.

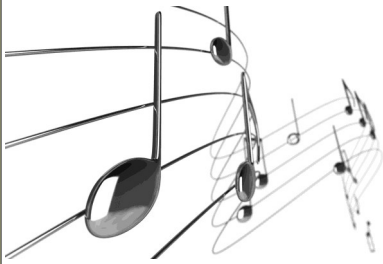


## MUSIC AT ASCENSION

### A NEW YEAR AHEAD!

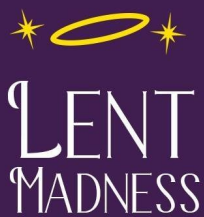
As I find myself already in the midst of my fifth month at Ascension, I am excited that this community worked very well with me to pull together some inspiring music around Advent and Christmas. January was, for me, about quickly catching my breath and moving into Lent and ultimately Holy Week and Eastertide!

With "the holidays" behind us and a new year stretching out in front of us, I am focusing on building strong community connections through music. Watch for interesting (possibly even exciting!) musical offerings during Lent and especially as we celebrate Holy Week and Easter.



And, of course, if you have ever sung or have always dreamed of doing so, NOW is the time to discuss opportunities with me. Choir is FUN — such a sweet group of singers! Think about how your voice could make us even better! I look forward to hearing from you!

With Gratitude,  
**Stephen Marshall**



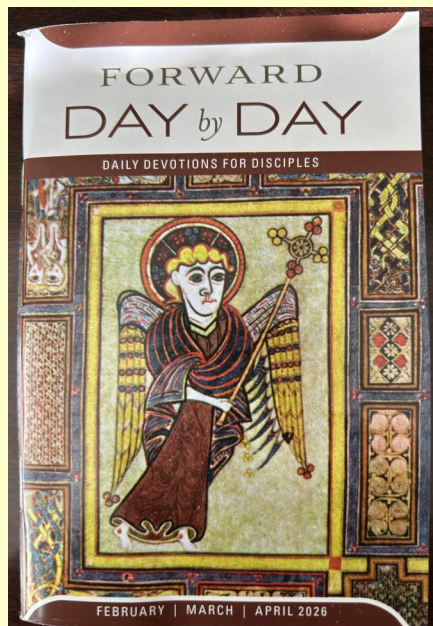
### Participate in Lent Madness beginning Thursday February 19

Here's how to participate: on the weekdays of Lent, information is posted at <http://www.lentmadness.org> about two different saints. Each pairing remains open for 24 hours as participants read about and then vote to determine which saint moves on to the next round. Sixteen saints make it to the Round of the Saintly Sixteen; eight advance to the Round of the Elate Eight; four make it to the Faithful Four; two to the Championship; and the winner is awarded the coveted Golden Halo.

If you're looking for a Lenten discipline that is fun, educational, occasionally goofy, and always joyful, join the Lent Madness journey. Lent needn't be all doom and gloom. After all, what could be more joyful than a season specifically set aside to get closer to Jesus Christ?

Who will win the  
**GOLDEN  
 HALO?**

[www.lentmadness.org](http://www.lentmadness.org)



Pick up a copy of the new Forward Movement Day by Day Booklet. Copies can be found at the back of the church and on the reception table in Hawks Hall.

**A \$2 donation is requested.**

# FRIENDS IN DEED \*

Friends in Deed is an interfaith non-profit providing services to unhoused families and families in crisis. We have supported their food pantry for a number of years.

The need is greater than ever. Last week **680** households collected food from the pantry amid rising grocery prices.

**GOLD** items include canned tuna/chicken, hearty soups, beef stew, chili, pasta & pasta sauce, peanut butter, cereal, rice, cooking oil, flour, sugar, fruit juice, jerky, granola bars, Capri Sun drinks and crackers.

Here are some reminders when donating food items:

Boxed Mac & cheese is useless without milk and butter

Boxed milk is a treasure for cereal-loving kids

Canned goods help more IF an opener is included (OR pop tops)

Cooking oil is a luxury but essential

Sugar and flour are treats

Tea and coffee make people feel cared for

Hamburger Helper needs ground meat to matter

Tuna and crackers make an easy lunch

PB&J are common but need the bread!



Let's continue to support our neighbors in the community and give generously each week.

# FRIENDS IN DEED \*

## *LENTEN OUTREACH PROJECT*

In the past, we have raised funds to purchase chickens, goats, and mosquito nets. This year, we are sticking close to home, and our Lenten Outreach Project is to raise funds for the purchase of a new 10 x 15 EZ Up for Friends in Deed. While we have supported the food pantry for many years, and will continue to do so, this canopy is an infrastructure need we can help with. The EZ ups are used outside to provide cover for volunteers and pantry community members. The large EZ ups run from \$1009.00 to \$1345.00.

Donations of any amount are welcome, and checks should be made out to Church of the Ascension and dropped in the Outreach box as you enter the sanctuary.

Shop Canopy Tents For Every Occasion



Tuesday, January 6th

End of Christmas Hymns and Carol Sing-along  
and Concert

Thank You to Lisa Wagner for the photos.



Our vision is that *The Episcopal Church of the Ascension* serves Christ today for those who will come to know Christ tomorrow.

**WORSHIP, FORMATION, PASTORAL CARE, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, PRESENCE**  
 25 E. Laurel Avenue, Sierra Madre, CA 91024 ~ 626-355-1133 www.ascension-sierramadre.com

## FEBRUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>1</b> <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	<b>2</b> 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall Fr. Michael out of office/Clergy Support Group	<b>3</b> 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	<b>4</b> 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall Men's Group Monthly Luncheon/Noon Nano's Café RSVP to Fr. Michael 6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Grp Meets	<b>5</b> 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Fr. Michael Out of Office/ NC GOE's					Fr. Michael Out of Office/GOE's	
<b>8</b> <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	<b>9</b> 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	<b>10</b> 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	<b>11</b> 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall 6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Grp Meets	<b>12</b> 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
Fr. Michael Out of Office/ NC GOE's						
<b>15</b> <u>8am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* 9am Choir Rehearsal <u>10:15am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live*	<b>16</b> PRESIDENTS DAY *PARISH OFFICE CLOSED* 8:30am Yoga/Hall	<b>17</b> 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper 5:30pm-7pm Hawks Hall	<b>18</b> 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall 6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Group Meets Ash Wednesday Services: Noon & 6pm	<b>19</b> 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>22</b> <u>9:30am Worship w/Eucharist</u> *Facebook Live* PARISH ANNUAL MEETING BEGINS RIGHT AFTER THE 9:30AM SERVICE Vestry Meeting & Organizational Meeting will follow the annual meeting.	<b>23</b> 8:15am-9:45am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall	<b>24</b> 10am-10:30am Gooden Chapel	<b>25</b> 8:15am-9am Gooden Chapel 8:30am Yoga/Hall 5:30pm Yoga/Hall 6pm Wednesday Night Dinner Group Meets	<b>26</b> 8:15am Mass 9am Rector's Forum 10:30am Staff Mtg	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>